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Entrepreneurial intentions among university students in Laos: the mediation effect of perceived university support

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This study examines entrepreneurial intentions (EI) among university students in Laos, with a focus on the mediating role of perceived university support within the framework of the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 318 final-year undergraduate students at the National University of Laos (NUoL) through a structured questionnaire. Hypotheses were tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with mediation analysis in the SmartPLS.4 software. Findings reveal that attitude toward entrepreneurship, perceived behavioral control, and perceived university support significantly and positively impact entrepreneurial intention. Moreover, perceived university support not only enhances intention directly, but also mediates the effects of subjective norms, attitude, and perceived behavioral control. These results have practical implications for policymakers and educational institutions, suggesting that efforts to cultivate entrepreneurial intentions should prioritize enhancing university support structures.

Keywords: entrepreneurial intention, perceived university support, PLS-SEM

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a key driver of economic development, plays a pivotal role in job creation, wealth accumulation, innovation, and overall societal progress (*Stoica et al., 2020; Emm et al., 2017)*. For countries aiming to address unemployment issues, to improve country competitiveness and achieve economic sustainability, the promotion of entrepreneurship and the support of entrepreneurship ecosystem are crucial strategies for policymakers (*Ács et al., 2008)*. Entrepreneurship fosters creativity and encourages individuals to explore untapped market opportunities, converting innovative ideas into successful ventures that contribute to the prosperity of nations *(Iakovleva et al., 2011; Mustafa et al., 2016).*

In developing countries like the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth and poverty alleviation *(Vixathep–Phonvisay, 2019).* Recognizing the critical role of improving entrepreneurship in Laos' economic development, the Lao government has implemented various initiatives to foster a conducive environment for startups and small businesses. Despite these efforts, entrepreneurial activity in Laos lags behind the neighboring countries', raising the need to examine the factors shaping entrepreneurial intentions within this context *(Philavanh, 2016; Vixathep–Phonvisay, 2019).*

At the core of entrepreneurial activity, Entrepreneurial intention serves as the foundation for entrepreneurial behavior. Without it, individuals are less likely to pursue the creation of new ventures (*Ismail et al., 2009)*. *Krueger et al. (2000)* and *Autio et al. (2001*) define entrepreneurial intention as the personal commitment and desire to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (TPB) *(Ajzen, 1991)* is one of the most widely accepted frameworks for understanding entrepreneurial intention. According to the TPB, entrepreneurial intentions are shaped by three main factors: attitudes toward entrepreneurship (ATE), subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC) *(Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen et al., 2018).* Although the TPB framework has been extensively applied in entrepreneurial intention research, recent studies suggest that external factors, such as institutional and environmental support, play a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions *(Lu et al., 2021; Anjum et al., 2021).*

Among these external factors, perceived university support (PUS) has gained attention as an important element in nurturing entrepreneurial intentions, particularly in the case of university students. Universities mayserve as fertile grounds for fostering entrepreneurship by promoting entrepreneurial mindset, offering access to resources, and creating ecosystems that support new venture creation *(Krueger–Brazeal, 1994; Bezanilla et al., 2020; Anjum et al., 2021; Maheshwari et al., 2023).* While previous studies have established that perceived university support can directly impact entrepreneurial intentions *(Alfianti et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2016; Shirokova et al., 2016; Su et al., 2021),* its potential mediating role within the theory of planned behavior framework has not been thoroughly investigated. Specifically, there is a limited understanding of how perceived university support interacts with the core TPB constructs. This study aims to fill this major gap by examining the mediating effect of perceived university support in these relationships, focusing on university students in Laos.

The emphasis on Laos is particularly important, as empirical research on entrepreneurial intentions within this context is limited, despite the fact that significant governmental effort has been made to promote entrepreneurship through higher education, as part of the country's broader economic development

strategy. Given Laos's unique social, cultural, and economic environment, understanding the factors that drive students' entrepreneurial intentions is timely and essential.

Present research aims to answer two main questions: first, to what extent do attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and perceived university support influence the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Laos? Second, does perceived university support mediate the relationships between the core components of the TPB and students' entrepreneurial intentions? By addressing these questions, the study aims to offer valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions, enabling them to design targeted interventions that leverage university support systems in order to foster a culture of entrepreneurship among students, ultimately contributing to national economic development goals.

1. Literature review

1.1 Theoretical background

1.1.1 Entrepreneurial intention (EI)

A compelling body of research defined entrepreneurial intentions (EI) as a potent determinant of new venture creation, exerting considerable influence on individuals' decisions to engage in entrepreneurial activities *(Kolveried, 1996).* EI denotes an individual's aspiration to initiate a business as a professional objective, encompassing attributes such as risk-taking, determination, and effective communication, commonly observed in entrepreneurs *(Kolveried, 1996, Vamvaka et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2021).* Intentionality plays a pivotal role in determining the antecedent intention to engage in them. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), intention is regarded as a crucial early stage in the entrepreneurial process *(GEM, 2021)*. *Bandura (1997)* asserts that intention precedes specific activities and anticipates outcomes in distinct situations, while *Ozaralli–Rivenburgh (2016)* emphasize the direct influence of intention on actual behavior, with stronger intentions being more successful in predicting behavior. *Mohan (2022)* underscores the positive implications of EI, suggesting that individuals with strong entrepreneurial intentions are more likely to identify economic opportunities compared to those lacking interest in entrepreneurship. Given the favorable outcomes associated with entrepreneurial activity, researchers and

policymakers are driven to attain a comprehensive understanding of EI *(Amofah–Saladrigues, 2022).*

1.1.2 Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (TPB) stands out as a remarkable theoretical framework, widely employed in the examination of intentions. This theory, developed to predict and explain human behavior *(Tornikoski–Maalaoui, 2019; Lortie–Castogiovanni, 2015)*, gained considerable popularity in entrepreneurial intention research *(Schlaegel–Koenig, 2014)*. According to TPB, the likelihood of engaging in a specific behavior is contingent upon an individual's intention to enact that behavior *(Ajzen, 2005)*. TPB suggests that attitudes toward the behavior, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms influence individuals' intentions *(Ajzen, 2005; 2011; Tornikoski–Maalaoui, 2019).*

Personal attitudes toward entrepreneurial behavior are shaped by individuals' expectations and beliefs about the personal benefits arising from such behavior, encompassing outcomes like personal wealth, autonomy, and contributions to the community *(Shapero–Sokol, 1982; Krueger et al., 2000).* Perceived social norms encompass influential social forces, including family, friends, role models, and mentors *(Krueger et al., 2000).* Additionally, perceived behavioral control aligns with Bandura's notion of perceived self-efficacy, reflecting an individual's belief in their capability to execute targeted entrepreneurial behavior *(Ajzen, 1985; Krueger et al., 2000).*

Empirical evidence from diverse contexts, from developed and developing countries, substantiates TPB's efficacy in comprehensively understanding the determinants of entrepreneurial intention *(Mothibi–Malebana, 2019).* Researchers such as *Liñán –Chen (2009)*, *Autio et al. (2001),* and *Krueger et al. (2000)* demonstrated TPB's ability to predict entrepreneurial intention. *Ajzen (1991)* further explains that TPB proposes strong intentions when attitudes and social norms favor a specific behavior, coupled with high perceived behavioral control. Investigating students' intentions is critical in the context of understanding their future career choices, with entrepreneurial intention considered as being the initial step toward starting a business.

1.2 Hypothesis development and conceptual framework

1.2.1 Attitude toward entrepreneurship (ATE) and entrepreneurial intention

Attitude toward a behavior reflects an individual's personal evaluations and beliefs about the consequences of performing that behavior *(Ajzen, 1991)*. In the entrepreneurial context, this construct represents an individual's judgment of entrepreneurship as a career path. *Ajzen–Fishbein (1980), Ajzen (1991, 2002)* statethat attitudes directly influence intentions, with more favorable attitudes correlating with stronger entrepreneurial intentions *(Zhang et al., 2014).*

The existing literature provides robust empirical support for the influential role of entrepreneurial attitudes in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. *Armitage–Conner (2001)* revealed in their meta-analysis of the TPB that attitudes toward entrepreneurship emerge as the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial intentions. This positive association between entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions has been consistently observed across diverse cultural and geographical contexts *(Lin et al., 2013; Iakovleva et al., 2011; Liñán–Chen, 2009; Liñán et al., 2010).* Furthermore, recent studies: *Mansah et al. (2021) Lu et al. (2021), Vamvaka et al. (2020*), have all demonstrated that individuals with more favorable entrepreneurial attitudes tend to exhibit stronger entrepreneurial intentions. Hypothesis 1 is formulated as follow

Hypothesis1: Attitude towards entrepreneurship significantly influences entrepreneurial intention

1.2.2 Subjective norms (SN) and entrepreneurial intention

Social relationships significantly influence individual behavior, including entrepreneurial intentions. SN reflects the perceived social pressure from a person's close relations such as family, friends, mentors and colleagues regarding their decision to pursue entrepreneurial activities (*Ajzen, 1991)*. SN captures the approval or disapproval individuals feel from their social circle concerning entrepreneurial endeavors. These social influences could play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions *(Ajzen, 1991; Solesvik et al., 2012).*

Research consistently highlights the positive role of subjective norms in shaping entrepreneurial intention (EI). Study from *Ferreira et al. (2012), Kolvereid–Isaksen (2006)* found a significant relationship between SN and EI, emphasizing the impact of social support. Similarly, *Méndez et al. (2015)* confirmed that SN significantly influenced EI among students in Spain. A study by *Mansah et al. (2021)* further supports this influence of SN.

However, the role of subjective norms remains debated. Studies by *Carr–Sequeira (2007)* suggest that the influence of SN on EI remains contested among

scholars, with some authors arguing that its effect may be more indirect than direct. *Krueger et al. (2000)* questioned whether subjective norms directly influence EI, and suggested that their effect might be mediated by other factors, such as perceived behavioral control and personal attitudes. *Liñán–Chen (2009)* similarly found that subjective norms affect EI indirectly. *Autio et al. (2001)* observed no significant effect among MBA students at the London Business School. Also, *Tsordia–Papadimitriou (2015)* found no significant effect among Greek students.

Given these contrasting perspectives, it is worth exploring whether SN has any influence on EI in different contexts, in Laos, for example.

Hypothesis 2: Subjective norms significantly influence entrepreneurial intention

1.2.3 Perceived behavioral control (PBC) and entrepreneurial intention

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) plays a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions, as it reflects an individual's belief in his/her ability to perform entrepreneurial activities and control resources and opportunities necessary to do so *(Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1986; Kolvereid, 1996)*. PBC influences how individuals perceive control over the outcomes of their entrepreneurial efforts, making it a key determinant of their intentions to pursue entrepreneurial ventures *(Krueger et al., 2000; Kautonen et al., 2015; Schlaegel–Koenig, 2014; Van Gelderen et al., 2017)*. PBC has been widely recognized as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intentions, individuals with higher PBC tend to view challenges as manageable issues and believe they can overcome obstacles, reinforcing their intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities (*Méndez et al., 2015; Armitage–Conner, 2001)*.

Empirical studies consistently support the positive relationship between PBC and EI, individuals who perceive greater control and believe in their abilities, are more likely to develop intention regarding entrepreneurship. A study by *Liñán et al. (2010)* founds that individuals with higher perceived control over entrepreneurial activities exhibit stronger intentions to start a business. Similarly, studies by *Vamvaka et al. (2020)*, *Song et al. (2021),* and *Tsaknis et al. (2022)* further confirm the critical role PBC plays in predicting entrepreneurial intentions across diverse contexts. Given the substantial evidence linking PBC to entrepreneurial intentions, the following hypothesis 3 can be formulated:

Hypothesis 3: perceived behavioral control significantly influences entrepreneurial intention

1.2.4 Role of perceived university support (PUS) and entrepreneurial intention

The TPB emphasizes three core components, ATE, PBC, and SN in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. External factors, however, such as university support (PUS) may significantly influence this process. Present study explores PUS as a mediating variable, given that universities play a critical role in fostering students' entrepreneurial intentions. By providing or withholding resources, universities can either encourage or hinder the development of entrepreneurial behavior *(Bazan, 2022; Su et al., 2021).*

PUS refers to the degree to which students believe their university provides the necessary resources, encouragement, and an environment conducive to entrepreneurial activities *(Alfianti et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2016)*. PUS encompasses access to entrepreneurship programs, mentorship opportunities, workshops, funding assistance, and a culture that promotes innovation and entrepreneurial thinking. Universities serve as entrepreneurial ecosystems that nurture innovation by offering physical resources (such as incubation centers), intellectual resources (such as expert faculty and research facilities), and social networks (connections with industry, entrepreneurs, and alumni). Research indicates that students perceiving high levels of university support demonstrate stronger entrepreneurial intentions *(Morris et al., 2017; Autio et al., 2001; Nabi et al., 2018)*. *Mustafa et al. (2016)* identified students' perception of university support as a crucial factor in developing entrepreneurial intentions.

Krueger–Brazeal (1994) state that universities play a pivotal role in shaping students' entrepreneurial mindset and engagement with entrepreneurship. Universities can provide a "nutrient-rich" environment with access to information, role models, and material resources that stimulate entrepreneurial behavior. They may offer targeted support, too, such as guidance in developing business concepts and launching new ventures *(Anjum et al., 2021).*

The literature consistently shows that students who perceive higher levels of university support tend to have stronger entrepreneurial intentions. A positive university environment is linked to higher entrepreneurial intentions *(Franke–Lüthje, 2004).* Numerous studies confirm a positive relationship between perceived university support and entrepreneurial intention *(Alfianti et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2021; Anjum et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021).*

The integration of PUS into the TPB framework suggests that university support not only influences entrepreneurial intentions directly but also serves as a mediating factor between TPB's core components (SN, ATE, and PBC) and entrepreneurial intention. Research indicates that PUS can enhance students' entrepreneurial intentions by boosting their confidence in own entrepreneurial

abilities and in reducing the perceived risks associated with entrepreneurship *(Saeed et al., 2015; Turker–Selcuk, 2009).*

According to *Krueger–Brazeal (1994)* and *Bezanilla et al. (2020)*, university support can improve the perceived feasibility of entrepreneurship by increasing students' knowledge and confidence in their entrepreneurial skills, thereby strengthening their intention to become an entrepreneur. University support also strengthens positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship by equipping students with relevant knowledge and practical experience, making entrepreneurial endeavors more feasible and attractive *(Krueger–Brazeal, 1994; Anjum et al., 2021; Fayolle, 2016)*. Furthermore, universities that promote entrepreneurship through resources, mentorship, and specialized programs create an environment where students feel encouraged and supported to align with societal expectations. This perceived support may mediate the relationship between subjective norms and entrepreneurial intentions by fostering an atmosphere that reinforces social influences conducive to entrepreneurial behavior *(Franke–Lüthje, 2004; Lu et al., 2021; Saeed et al., 2015; Ferreira et al., 2017; Anjum et al., 2021).*

Hypothesis 4. Perceived University support significantly influences entrepreneurial intention

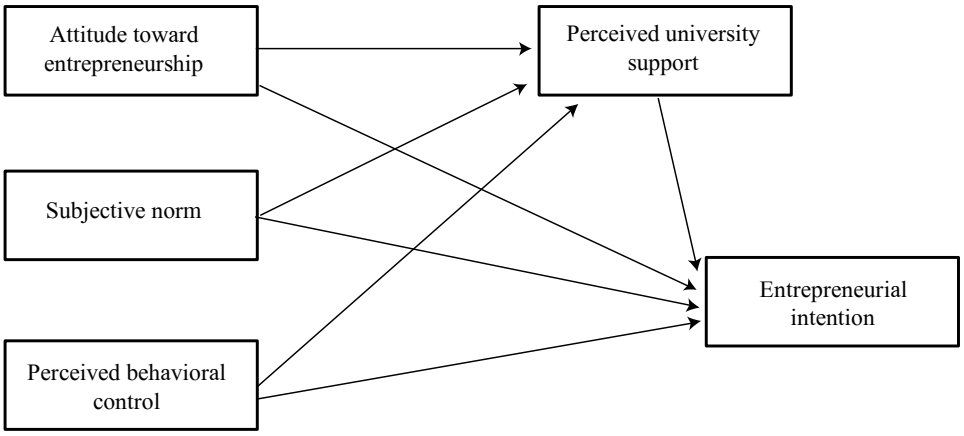
Hypothesis 5: Perceived university support mediates the relationship between subjective norms and entrepreneurial intention.

Hypothesis 6: Perceived university support mediates the relationship between attitudes toward entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention.

Hypothesis 7: Perceived university support mediates the relationship between perceived behavioral control and entrepreneurial intention.

Figure 1

Proposed conceptual framework of the study



Source: author' construct.

Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual model for present study, building upon the insights from the existing body of literature. The model proposes that ATE, SN, and PBC are important predictors of entrepreneurial intention, with PUS acting as a mediator that enhances the effects of these predictors on students' entrepreneurial intentions. This mediation suggests that university support is crucial for translating personal beliefs and social influences into a strong intention to engage in entrepreneurship.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sampling and data collection

The research targeted final-year students enrolled in the Faculty of Economics and Business Management at the National University of Laos (NUoL). NUoL, recognized as a central hub of higher education in Laos, attracts students from diverse regions, offering a comprehensive and inclusive sample for examining entrepreneurial intentions in the Lao context. The decision to focus on the Faculty of Economics and Business Management as the study population is grounded in strategic considerations.

Firstly, the relevance of the faculty in regard to entrepreneurship studies is paramount. As the faculty probably provides programs directly related to business, entrepreneurship, and management, it serves as an ideal environment for investigating the factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions among students. Secondly, the concentration of potential entrepreneurs within the Faculty of Economics and Business Management is notable. Students pursuing academic disciplines in this faculty are inherently more likely to harbor an interest in business and entrepreneurship, aligning with the nature of their academic pursuits. This concentration enhances the study's relevance to its research objectives.

Data collection employed an online questionnaire, created by using Google Forms. The survey questions were formulated based on revised measures from previous studies, with adjustments made to accommodate the characteristics of the target sample. To ensure content validity, the final questionnaire underwent pre-testing among academics and non-participating students. The questionnaire was translated into Lao and subsequently back-translated into English by a different translator to ensure linguistic compatibility. A pilot study involving 20 students yielded satisfactory results.

Distribution of the questionnaire to students was facilitated by lecturers at the faculty, adhering to ethical considerations. Participation was strictly voluntary, and students were informed that their responses would be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. While PLS-SEM generally requires a sample size that is at least 10 times the number of indicators for the most complex construct in the model *(Peng–Lai, 2012),* it is often recommended in PLS literature to use G* Power analysis to accurately determine the appropriate sample size *(Hair et al., 2016)*. Consequently, the G* Power 3.1 software was employed to ensure the sample size met the necessary threshold. The study determined a minimum sample size of 85 participants based on the number of predictors, corresponding to a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$) and a power of 0.8. Upon completion of the data collection phase, a total of 318 questionnaires met the predetermined criteria and were deemed suitable for further analysis in the study, exceeding the minimum requirement.

2.2. Common method bias

Ensuring data cleanliness and suitability for analysis is essential for maintaining study integrity. Addressing common method bias (CMB) is a crucial part of this process, as it can threaten internal validity by inflating associations between variables. *Podsakoff et al. (2003)* describe CMB as arising when the measurement method influences response variance more than the actual constructs are measured. To assess CMB, Harman's single-factor test, a widely recognized method *(Podsakoff et al., 2003),* was employed.

Results showed that a single-factor structure accounted for only 36.23% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold suggested by *Podsakoff et al. (2003).* This finding indicates that common method bias does not significantly contribute to the variance in the data, reinforcing the credibility of the study's results. By examining CMB thoroughly, the study strengthens the reliability of its data and the validity of the observed relationships.

2.3 Measurement and statical method

The Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire used in the study was specifically developed to assess entrepreneurial intention and its underlying determinants, drawing upon Ajzen's theory of planned behavior. The questionnaire incorporated a combination of questions using a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) and nominal scales.

The entrepreneurial intention was measured using a set of four items, the subjective norm was assessed with four items. Both variables were adapted from previous works by *Liñán–Chen (2009)* and *Liñán et al. (2011), Solesvik et al. (2012), Krugers et al. (2000)*. Attitude toward entrepreneurship was evaluated using five items, derived from the works of *Liñán–Chen (2009)* and *Bachiri (2016), Solesvik et al. (2012)*, perceived behavioral control consisted of five items adapted from *Liñán–Chen (2009).* Lastly, perceived university support was measured using a set of four items, adapted from the study by *Saeed et al. (2015), Schwarz et al. (2009), Fayolle–Liñán (2014),* and *Franke–Lüthje (2004)*

Data in present study were statistically analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0, which employed the partial least squares structural equation modeling method (PLS-SEM). According to *Hair et al. (2019)*, PLS-SEM is acknowledged for its adaptability, making it well-suited for studies that aim to explore and generate hypotheses about the relationships between constructs. In the context of this study, the primary objective is to research and predict the intricate connections within the entrepreneurial intention framework with mediation effect analysis. Therefore, PLS-SEM's flexibility offers a less restrictive modeling approach *(Hair et al., 2016; Ringle et al., 2012)*. An additional advantage of utilizing PLS-SEM in the analysis is that it obviates the need for a normality test. This is noteworthy because issues related to the normal distribution of data are less of concern when using PLS-SEM, streamlining the analytical process and allowing for a more robust examination of the research constructs *(Hair et al., 2016)*.

The PLS-SEM data analysis unfolded in two strategic steps. The initial stage involved a thorough examination of the measurement model, evaluating the reliability and validity of the study's constructs *Hair et al. (2019).* The second step of the PLS-SEM analysis involved a detailed examination of the associations within the structural model, putting the study hypotheses to the test at specified significance levels *(Chin, 2010)*. Model estimation was performed using metrics such as R^2, Q^2. In the context of PLS-SEM, these metrics are essential for evaluating model fit, as they assess the model's explanatory power (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) for the relationships between the variables under investigation *(Hair et al., 2019).*

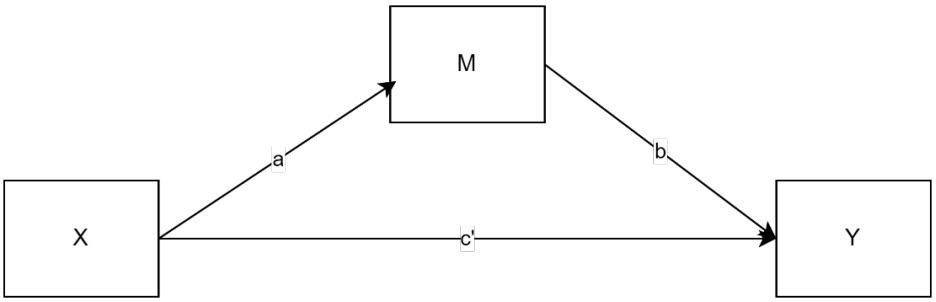
2.4 Mediation analysis

Mediation analysis assesses whether the effect of an independent variable (X) on a dependent variable (Y) is channeled through a third variable, known as the mediator (M) *(Baron–Kenny, 1986)*. In this study, the analysis examines whether PUS mediates the relationship between core component of TPB and EI.

The study follows a two-step process in testing mediation (*Nitzl et al., 2016)*: first, examines the indirect effect by calculating the product of two paths: a from X to M and b from M to Y (Figure 2). The significance of the indirect effect is tested through bootstrapping, which provides confidence intervals. If these intervals do not include zero, the indirect effect is considered statistically significant *(Preacher et al., 2007*; *Gunzler et al., 2013).*

Figure 2

General mediation model



Source: Baron and Kenny's mediation model.

Second, determines the type of mediation. The mediation effect can be classified as either full or partial. According to *Nitzl et al. (2016),* full mediation occurs when the mediator fully accounts for the relationship between X and Y, resulting in a non-significant direct effect (c') when the mediator is included in the model. Partial mediation, on the other hand, is observed when both the indirect effect (a x b) via mediator and direct effect (c') between X and Y is significant *(Nitzl et al., 2016)*.

3. Finding

3.1 Measurement model analysis

In employing PLS-SEM, reliability is a necessary condition for validity. According *to Hair et al. (2017),* indicator reliability should be assessed to ensure how well each indicator reflects its associated construct. Factor loadings are

commonly used for this purpose, with values of 0.7 or higher being ideal. However, for social science studies, factor loadings between 0.6 to 0.7 are considered acceptable (*Hair et al., 2017).* They further state that if an indicator's factor loading is below 0.5, it may be removed to improve model fit.

Various methods were applied to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, covering internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity *(Hair et al., 2019)*. Convergent validity was determined through the average variance extracted (AVE) values, following *Henseler et al. (2015),* with a recommended threshold of 0.50. In Table 1, all AVE values surpassed the established threshold, indicating satisfactory convergent validity.

To evaluate internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) were employed. In this study, CA values for each case exceeded the threshold of 0.7 (CA > 0.7) for each construct (Table 1), indicating acceptable internal consistency. Similarly, CR values above 0.70, as proposed *by Hair et al. (2019)*, were considered satisfactory. The composite reliabilities of the different measures demonstrated that they met the prescribed threshold.

Table 1

Measurement of model

Construct	Item	Outer loadings	Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE
Attitude toward entrepreneurship (ATE)	ATE1	0.747	0.828	0.879	0.595
	ATE2	0.843			
	ATE3	0.817			
	ATE4	0.765			
	ATE5	0.671			
Subjective norms (SN)	SN1	0.682	0.812	0.880	0.652
	SN2	0.833			
	SN3	0.888			
	SN4	0.717			
Entrapreneurial intention (EI)	EI1	0.860	0.823	0.878	0.592
	EI2	0.859			
	EI3	0.874			
	EI4	0.701			
	EI5	0.629			
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	PBC1	0.649	0.853	0.888	0.570
	PBC2	0.808			
	PBC3	0.815			
	PBC4	0.771			
	PBC5[a)]	0.473			
Perceived university support (PUS)	PUS1	0.686	0.735	0.832	0.555
	PUS2	0.823			
	PUS3	0.664			
	PUS4	0.795			

a) PBC5 is removed to improve AVE due to low outer loading.
Source: author's construct from SmartPLS 4.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) assesses discriminant validity in PLS-SEM. The HTMT is regarded as a robust method for assessing discriminant validity in PLS-SEM *(Hair et al., 2017)*. HTMT is calculated as the ratio of the average correlations between items across different constructs to the average correlations of items within the same construct (*Hair et al., 2019)*. High HTMT values suggest potential issues with discriminant validity. When constructs in the path model are conceptually distinct, a lower threshold value of .90 is recommended *(Henseler et al., 2015)*. In this study, the HTMT values, as shown in Table 2, fall below this threshold, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity and suggesting that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another.

Table 2

Discriminant validity (Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix)

Construct	ATE	EI	PBC	PUS
ATE				
EI	0.57			
PBC	0.246	0.378		
PUS	0.364	0.499	0.478	
SN	0.22	0.308	0.602	0.531

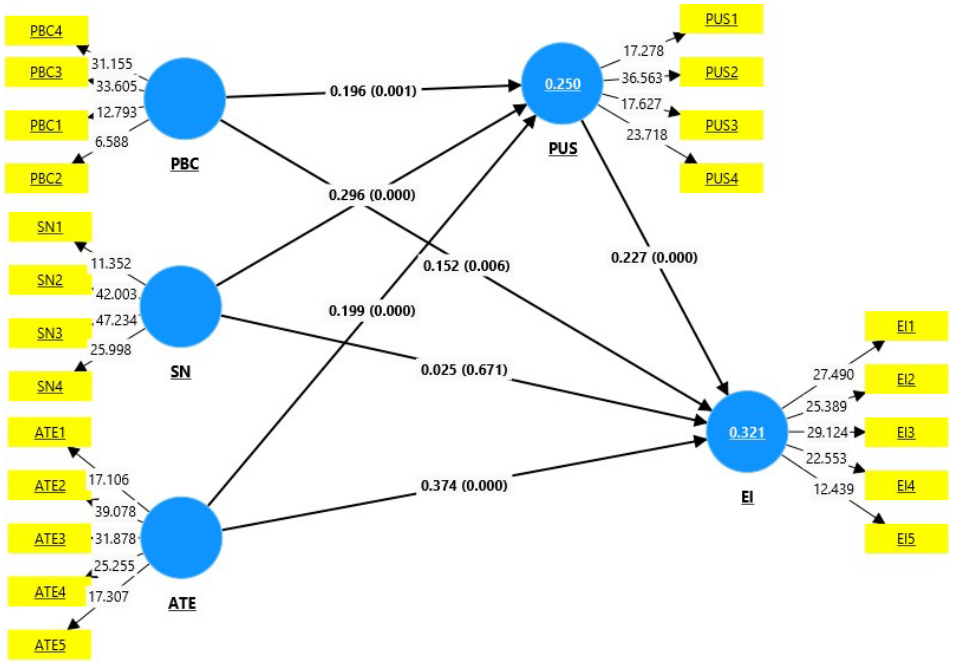
Source: SmartPLS 4.1.0.4.

3.2 Structural model assessment

The structural model assessment examines the relationship between the latent constructs and evaluates the predictive value of the conceptual model *(Hair et al., 2019)*. To detect the presence of collinearity within the model, a collinearity test was performed. The results of the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF scores ranged from 1.27 to 3.07, all of which are below the acceptable threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Next, the model's key predictive indicators were evaluated. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was applied to measure the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by independent variables, reflecting the model's explanatory power. Predictive relevance (Q^2) assessed the model's predictive accuracy, and the path coefficient was examined to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between constructs *(Hair et al., 2017)*.

Figure 3

Measurement structured model outcome



Source: SmartPLS 4.1.0.4.

Table 3

Constructed model

	R-square	Q²predict
PUS	0.321	0.308
EI	0.250	0.226

Source: author's construct from SmartPLS 4.

Chin (1998) suggests that R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 correspond to substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power, respectively. The findings indicate that the exogenous constructs in this study collectively explain 32.1% (Figure 2) of the variance in the endogenous construct, entrepreneurial intention (EI). This suggests that the model exhibits a moderate explanatory capability in line with *Chin's (1998)* criteria.

Predictive Relevance (Q^2) is also a crucial measure in PLS-SEM for assessing a model's predictive performance. It evaluates how well the model can predict endogenous latent variables, particularly when assessing its out-of-sample predictive accuracy *(Chin, 2010)*. A Q^2 value greater than zero indicates the

model's predictive relevance *(Henseler et al., 2009)*. The Q^2 values obtained in this study, 0.308 for EI and 0.226 for PUS, both are greater than zero, confirming the model's predictive relevance. It means the model not only explains a moderate portion of the variance but also has the capacity to predict future outcomes with acceptable accuracy *(Chin, 2010)*.

3.3 Hypothesis testing

Table 4

Hypothesis result

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Result
H1	ATE → EI	0.374	0.059	6.377	0.000	Supported
H2	SN → EI	0.025	0.058	0.425	0.671	Not supported
H3	PBC → EI	0.152	0.055	2.776	0.006	Supported
H4	PUS → EI	0.227	0.056	4.043	0.000	Supported

Note: ATE = Attitude toward entrepreneurship; SN = Subjective norm; PCB = perceived behavioral control; PUS = perceived university support, EI = entrepreneurship intention.
Source: author's construct from SmartPLS. 4.

Hypotheses 1–4 were tested using path analysis to determine the t-statistic values and p-values at a % significance level. As shown in Table 4, the findings support hypotheses H1, H3, and H4, but not H2.

H1 (ATE → EI): The path coefficient from attitude toward entrepreneurship to entrepreneurial intention is 0.374 ($\beta = 0.374$, p-value < 0.05). This indicates a strong, statistically significant positive relationship, suggesting that a favorable entrepreneurial attitude significantly enhances entrepreneurial intentions. Notably, ATE has the highest path coefficient, underscoring its primary influence on EI. However, H2 (SN → EI): subjective norms yielded a path coefficient of 0.025 ($\beta = 0.025$, p-value>0.05), which is not statistically significant. This result suggests that subjective norms do not have a significant effect on entrepreneurial intentions within this study's context. H3 (PBC → EI): The path coefficient for perceived behavioral control (PBC) is 0.152 ($\beta = 0.152$, p-value < 0.05), indicating statistical significance. This finding implies that a higher perception of control over entrepreneurial activities correlates positively with stronger entrepreneurial intentions. For H4 (PUS → EI): perceived university support shows a path coefficient of 0.227 ($\beta = 0.227$, p-value < 0.05), indicating a statistically significant positive effect on EI. Within this study's context, PUS emerges as the second most influential predictor of EI, highlighting the critical role

of university support in nurturing students' intentions to start business as a career path.

3.4 Mediation analysis

Table 5

Mediation effect

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T statistics	P values	Result
H5	SN → PUS → EI	0.067	3.121	0.002	Supported (full mediation)
H6	ATE → PUS → EI	0.045	2.561	0.010	Supported (partial mediation)
H7	PBC → PUS → EI	0.044	2.503	0.012	Supported (partial mediation)

Source: author's construct from SmartPLS.4.

These results confirm the mediating role of PUS for the effects of SN, ATE, and PBC on EI.

The results demonstrate statistical significance for H5, H6 and H7, indicating full mediation for H5 (SN → PUS → EI). This suggests that SN positively influence Entrepreneurial Intention through the mediating role of PUS ($\beta = 0.067$, p-value < 0.05). For H6(ATE → PUS → EI), the findings support partial mediation, implying that while ATE directly and positively affects EI, PUS also enhances this relationship, further bolstering entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.045$, p-value < 0.05). Similarly, the results for H7 PBC → PUS → EI) indicate partial mediation, suggesting that PBC directly influences EI, and PUS serves to strengthen this effect by further facilitating entrepreneurial intentions significant ($\beta = 0.044$, p-value < 0.05).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The outcomes of this research significantly enhance our comprehension of entrepreneurial intention within the unique context of Laos. The results support H1, indicating a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between ATE and EI. The positive relationship observed in this study reinforces the TPB

framework, suggesting that attitudes toward entrepreneurship are fundamental in developing entrepreneurial intentions *(Ajzen, 1991).* This result is consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the critical role of entrepreneurial attitudes in shaping individuals' intentions to pursue entrepreneurial activities *(Kim-Soon et al., 2018; Liñán–Chen, 2009; Liñán et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2021; Mansah et al., 2021; Vamvaka et al., 2020).*

The analysis reveals a non-significant effect of subjective norms on entrepreneurial intentions (H2), suggesting that, within the context of this study, social influences do not significantly shape entrepreneurial intentions. This finding diverges from aspects of the TPB and contrasts with studies such as *Ferreira et al. (2012), Kolvereid–Isaksen (2006), Mansah et al. (2021), Eid et al. (2019),* and *Ahmed et al. (2020),* which emphasize the positive impact of social influences on entrepreneurial intentions. The results of this paper align with studies by *Krueger et al. (2000)* and *Autio et al. (2001),* further supported by *Liñán–Chen (2009)* who suggest that subjective norms may indirectly influence entrepreneurial intentions through other factors. This implies that for students in Laos the intention to pursue entrepreneurship as a career path may not be directly influenced by their peers.

Moving on to perceived behavioral control (H3), PBC also has a significant positive effect on EI, indicating that students who believe in their entrepreneurial capabilities and perceive greater control over entrepreneurial activities have a higher likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurship. This finding is consistent with the TPB framework *(Ajzen, 1991)* and supports previous studies that identify PBC as a key determinant of entrepreneurial intention *(Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán–Chen, 2009; Song et al., 2021; Tsaknis et al., 2022).*

The findings for H4, H5, H6, and H7 demonstrate that perceived university support (PUS) positively influences entrepreneurial intentions (EI), in alignment with prior research (*Alfianti et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2021; Anjum et al., 2021; Shi et al., 2019; Shirokova et al., 2016; Su et al., 2021)* on the critical role of university support. This support not only acts as a direct driver of entrepreneurial intentions but also mediates and strengthens the effects of TPB core components. The full mediation in H5 underscores the importance of university support in transforming social expectations into entrepreneurial intentions. Furthermore, the partial mediation in H6 and H7 demonstrates how university support amplifies the impact of individual attitudes and perceived control. This boosts students' confidence in their ability to tackle entrepreneurial challenges and reinforces their positive attitudes toward entrepreneurial pursuits. These findings highlight the essential role of university support in fostering entrepreneurial intentions by aligning social expectations, enhancing students' perceived control, and strengthening entrepreneurial attitudes *(Mustafa et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2021; Anjum et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021).*

5. Theoretical and practical implication

The findings of this study offer important contributions to the theory of planned behavior literature by demonstrating the significant role of an external factor, university support in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. Incorporating perceived university support into the theory of planned behavior framework offers a more comprehensive perspective on how environmental factors can reinforce the connections between psychological antecedents and entrepreneurial aspirations. This integrated model suggests that the TPB can be enhanced by including institutional or environmental factors that help translate personal beliefs into actionable entrepreneurial intentions.

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that efforts to foster entrepreneurial intentions in Laos should focus on boosting students' perceived behavioral control and positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Programs offering practical skills, mentorship, and confidence-building initiatives are likely to be effective. This has implications for both educational institutions and policymakers aiming to cultivate entrepreneurship. Enhancing university support by establishing entrepreneurship centers, starting training programs, access to mentorship and networking can significantly nurture entrepreneurial ambitions.

Policymakers or relevant government bodies also play a vital role in creating a conducive environment for student entrepreneurship. They should consider implementing policies that incentivize universities to support entrepreneurial activities, as this could drive economic growth and development. Additionally, awareness campaigns, conferences, competitions, and other initiatives could promote entrepreneurship as a viable career path. Collaborative efforts between policymakers and educational institutions aimed to offer grants, incubation programs, and industry partnerships can further empower students with the resources and experience needed to effectively pursue entrepreneurship.

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